

Winning Beyond the Game

Coaching Strategies that Strengthen Mental Health
and Performance

PRESENTED BY

Ashleigh and Clete Purinton

About the Presenters

Ashleigh

Education

- BA, Sociology (2004)
- Masters in Marriage and Family Therapy (2008)

Professional Experience

- Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist (2012)
- Private Practice focusing on youth and families
- Roseville PONY Baseball Board Member (4 years)
 - Focus: Sportsmanship, Academics, Safety

Clete

Education

- BS, Business Management (2001)
- M.ED (Master of Education) (2009)

Professional Experience

- HS Basketball Coach (14 years)
- Teacher (11 years)
- School Administrator (11 years)
- Parent/Coach (10+ years)

Learning Objectives

Identify

Identify at least three behavioral, emotional, or physical indicators that may suggest an adolescent athlete is experiencing a mental-health concern.

Describe

Describe at least three coaching strategies that can promote psychological safety, confidence, belonging, and reduced performance anxiety.

Differentiate

Differentiate roles between the coach's supportive role and the mental-health professional's clinical role, identifying key next steps for support.

Quick Introduction

Name

Introduce yourself and share your name with the group.

Role

Describe your current role, background, or area of focus.

Why This Conversation Matters

Coach's Influence

What role does a coach play in an athlete's mental health?

The Paradigm Shift

Transition from performance to development to the whole person.

Mental Health & Coaching for Success

Adolescent Mental Health: A majority of youth struggling with mental health issues are dealing with anxiety and depression (Sappenfield, 2024)

1 in 5

Youth Have Diagnosable Disorder

Approximately 20% of all adolescents have diagnosed mental/behavioral health diagnosis (Sappenfield, 2024)

20%/18%

Anxiety / Depression Risk

Adolescent self-report of experiencing anxiety/depressive symptoms in the last two weeks (CDC, 2025)

70%

Leaving Sports

By early adolescence, youth are leaving sports due to burnout and adult pressures (Baron, 2025)

Mental Health and Child Development

Erikson's Stages of Development

School Age

Industry vs. Inferiority

A critical period of development where children learn to build skills, cope with academic demands, and develop a sense of pride in their accomplishments.

Adolescence

Identity vs. Role Confusion

A stage of self-discovery where teenagers explore their independence, values, and develop a coherent sense of personal identity.

Turn and Talk

Can you think of a time when you experienced a negative or hyper critical environment?

How did it impact your experience or performance?

Mental Health Disorders among Athletes



The image features three vertical panels. The first panel on the left is light blue with a dark blue vertical line on its left side and contains the text 'Anxiety and Depression' in dark blue. The middle panel is light pink with a dark pink vertical line on its left side and contains the text 'Eating Disorders' in dark pink. The third panel on the right is light blue with a dark blue vertical line on its left side and contains the text 'Suicidality' in dark blue. At the bottom right, there is a decorative geometric pattern consisting of several overlapping triangles in shades of pink and red.

**Anxiety and
Depression**

**Eating
Disorders**

Suicidality

Anxiety/Depression: What can contribute?

Anxiety Contributors

- **Environmental Pressure:** Highly competitive or critical settings.
- **Fear of Failure:** Catastrophizing and dreading mistakes.
- **Overthinking:** Second-guessing or hesitating in action.
- **Negative Self-Talk:** Excessive self-criticism.
- **Shutting Down:** Withdrawing under severe criticism.

Depression Contributors

- **Grief or Loss:** Dealing with painful life transitions.
- **Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs):** Early traumatic stressors.
- **Chronic Frustration:** Prolonged feelings of helplessness.
- **Failure:** Struggle to cope with setbacks and defeats.

How can Anxiety & Depression show up?

Anxiety Presentation

- **Restlessness & Irritability:** Feeling wound up or easily annoyed.
- **Concentration Difficulties:** Struggle to focus on tasks or plays.
- **Emotional Outbursts:** Uncharacteristic expressions of anger or frustration.
- **Somatic Complaints:** Physical tension, headaches, or stomach issues.

Depression Presentation

- **Motivation Changes:** Drop in drive, energy, or interest.
- **Social Withdrawal:** Pulling away from peers, teammates, and coaches.
- **Physical Health:** Higher frequency of illness or susceptibility to injury.
- **Recovery Issues:** Slow recovery from training or physical setbacks.
- **Sleep Disturbance:** Chronic insomnia or disrupted sleep cycles.

Eating Disorders Statistics

84%

College Athletes

Struggle with some form of disordered eating (Rittenhouse, 2021)

45% /
19%

Gender Distribution

Disordered eating impacts **45%** of female athletes and **19%** of male athletes (Rittenhouse, 2021)

8x

Increased Injury Risk

Athletes struggling with disordered eating are **8x** more likely to suffer injuries (Ortiz, 2024)

Causes of Eating Disorders

Weight Pressure

Environment where there is pressure to modify weight (gymnastics, wrestling, etc.)

Coaching Focus

Coaches that focus primarily on success and performance rather than the whole person

Low Self-Esteem

Difficulty maintaining a positive self-image or core feelings of personal value

Perfectionism

Setting unrealistically high standards and engaging in harsh self-criticism

Family Dysfunction

Systemic family conflicts, high behavioral control, or communication barriers

ACEs

Adverse Childhood Experiences that heighten systemic stress and vulnerability

How may disordered eating show up

**Wearing baggy
clothes to hide body**

**Complaining about
being fat**

**Excessive
exercising**

**Refusing meals in
front of others**

**Eating too small
portions of food**



Recognizing possible suicide risk

Change from baseline

Noticeable and significant changes in athletes behavior

Withdrawal

Loss of connection

Expressions of hopelessness

Feeling like a burden

Concerning Statements

Not wanting to be here, disappearing, and death

Emotional Shifts

Mood swings and agitation

What should a Coach Do?

WHAT TO AVOID

Don't diagnose

Don't promise secrecy

Don't assume it will pass

WHAT TO DO

Follow organization safety protocol

Connect the athlete to the appropriate adult/professional

Coach vs. Clinician

Coach

- Notice changes
- Build relationships
- Listen and support
- Promote healthy team culture
- Communicate concerns
- Refer/connect

Mental Health Professional

- Assess
- Diagnose
- Provide clinical treatment
- Develop treatment plan
- Manage clinical risk
- Provide ongoing clinical care

Turn and Talk

THE SCENARIO

A 15-year old athlete who normally interacts with teammates has become increasingly withdrawn. Over the last three weeks, they have missed meals with the team, seem unusually irritable, and have stopped participating in activities they previously enjoyed.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What do you notice?
- What do you say?
- What should you avoid doing?
- Who might need to be involved?

Turn and Talk

WHAT DO YOU NOTICE?

Withdrawal, behavior changes, eating changes, lack of engagement, and anhedonia.

WHAT WOULD YOU SAY?

Initiate a one-on-one conversation. Check in and ask if they are okay, gently noting the changes you have seen.

WHAT SHOULD YOU AVOID DOING?

Avoid group conversations. Never promise total secrecy, and do not assume the behavior will just pass.

WHO MIGHT NEED TO BE INVOLVED?

Parents or guardians, the school counselor, and potential support through mandated reporting procedures.

Turn and Talk

Who was your favorite coach or teacher as an adolescent?

What specific qualities or characteristics made them so memorable to you?

Creating a positive team culture (PCA, nd)

THE FOUNDATION

Establishing a positive environment is paramount to supporting student athletes in their growth and development.

ACTIONABLE STRATEGIES

Practice what you preach (Model positive behavior)

Reinforcing expectations to players, assistant coaches, and parents on a regular basis.

Emphasize and reward good sportsmanship.

Addressing each player's role and the importance of their presence on the team.

Addressing players and parents that act or behave in a way that hinders the experience for athletes.

Building Self-esteem and Confidence (PCA, nd)

Feedback & Praise

Shift from negative criticism to truthful praise and constructive feedback.

Athletes can view challenges as opportunities to compete and grow vs. threat to self worth.

Individual Connection

Take time to get to know athletes individually and recognize day to day progress.

Building personal connections establishes motivation and a strong sense of value and belonging in their athletes.

Psychological Safety

SAFE ENVIRONMENTS (PCA, nd)

Make mistakes a valued part of the learning process.

- Athletes feel safe to admit to making mistakes.
- Sharing vulnerabilities without fear of humiliation significantly lowers performance anxiety.

PROCESS feedback (PCA, nd)

Provide feedback that builds confidence and lowers anxiety.

Praise the process, effort, strategy, and execution—things the athlete can directly control.

Instead of: "Great win today."

Try: "Your hustle on our transition defense was exactly what we worked on. That effort changes the game."

Staying in the Now

Staying in the Now

Establish mindfulness and practice routines to reinforce preparation.

- **Mindfulness:**
 - 5 senses grounding
 - One word “reset”
 - Task/technique focus instead of outcome.
- **Consistent Drills:** Regular practice routines and drills to build muscle memory and confidence.
- End of practice cool down
 - When were you most focused?
 - What’s one thing you want to carry into the next practice/game?

Basic Needs (Farrell, 2025)

Support the core physiological and emotional pillars of performance.

- **Sleep:** Prioritizing recovery, cognitive function, and emotional resilience.
- **Nutrition:** Consistently fueling the body to meet high physical demands.
- **Joy:** Cultivating fun and passion to prevent burnout and reduce pressure.

Support-Instruction-Encouragement

The “Support-Instruction-Encouragement” Sandwich • **Avoid dwelling on mistakes.**

SUPPORT

Acknowledge a success

INSTRUCTION

Give one clear correction
for the next rep

ENCOURAGEMENT

End with a belief in their
capabilities

EXAMPLE IN ACTION

"Your footwork on that first move was spot on **[Support]**. For the next one, focus on keeping your chest up **[Instruction]**. You've got the reps in, you'll nail the next one **[Encouragement]**."

Specific & Descriptive Feedback (PCA, nd)

Great Coaches use Specific, Descriptive Feedback

THE PITFALL

Common Feedback: "Good Job"

- Not specific or descriptive.
- This feedback doesn't help an athlete know what effort or execution they can replicate.

THE SOLUTION

Specific & Descriptive Feedback

- Explains exactly what was successful so the athlete understands the mechanics of their achievement.

EXAMPLE:

"Your follow-through was excellent there, that's why you got that power."

Important Qualities in a Coach (Farrell, 2025)

STEADY LEADERSHIP

Steady Coach = Steady Team

Consistency in your demeanor translates directly to a stable, focused team environment.

Avoid Favoritism

Build trust by treating every athlete with equal fairness and respect.

BETTER RELATIONS

People over Plays

Stronger personal connections naturally lead to better execution of X's and O's

Non-Relational Style

If you aren't naturally a "players' coach", remain effective by focusing on the whole person and staying steady.

CLEAR COMMUNICATION

Communication is Key

Open dialogue ensures there are no ambiguities in expectations.

Understand Roles

Athletes must clearly know their specific roles and exactly what to work on to improve.

Turn and Talk

The Case of Jordan

Jordan is a 14-year old athlete who has always been engaged in practice. Over the past month, the coach notices that Jordan has become hesitant during drills and rarely volunteers to go first. After making a mistake, Jordan becomes visibly frustrated and says, "I'm terrible at this."

The coach responds, "You have to stop making that mistake. We've worked on this." Jordan becomes even more anxious and hesitant.

The next day, Jordan makes a mistake and immediately looks toward the coach, waiting for a reaction.

What do you notice?

What might the athlete be experiencing?

What could the coach change about their response?

Turn and Talk

What do you notice?

Coach's focus on performance, Jordan's change in engagement.

What might Jordan experience?

Hesitancy, lacks confidence, fear of failure, performance anxiety.

What could the coach change?

Normalize mistakes as part of learning.

Use specific and descriptive feedback, focus on effort, process, establish a connection, and focus on the present task.

Five Things You Can Do Tomorrow

**Know your
athletes**

**Use Specific
Feedback**

**Normalize
Mistakes**

**Notice
Changes**

**Know your
referral
pathway**

Key Takeaways

1. Understand Demands

Deepening your understanding of the unique psychological demands that student athletes face will help you support the overall health and well-being of your players.

2. Apply Strategies

By implementing a few key coaching strategies, you can promote psychological safety, confidence, belonging, and healthy performance.

3. Recognize & Support

Coaches ability to recognize and respond appropriately to potential mental-health concerns helps connect the athlete with needed resources and support.

Knowledge Check

<https://forms.gle/aawuSfSRfYZiGSPFA>



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Q & A

